DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 469 208 FL 027 480

AUTHOR	Hancock, Zennia
TITLE	Heritage Spanish Speakers' Language Learning Strategies. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-FL-02-06
PUB DATE	2002-10-00
NOTE	4p.
CONTRACT	ED-99-CO-0008
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Heritage Education; *Learning Strategies; *Native Language Instruction; *Native Speakers; Second Language Learning; *Spanish
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

This digest describes some of the issues involved in the Spanish language learning experiences of heritage Spanish speakers, the largest population of heritage language speakers in the United States. It describes ways in which educators can facilitate these students' language development through a better understanding of their language learning strategies and suggests areas in which further research is needed. (Author/VWL)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 469 208

ERIC DIGEST

Heritage Spanish Speakers' Language Learning Strategies

ERIC Digest

EDO-FL-02-06

October 2002

Zennia Hancock

University of Maryland

College Park

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

- ☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics
Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL)
4646 40th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20016

FL 027 480

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC DIGEST EDO-FL-02-06 • OCTOBER 2002

Heritage Spanish Speakers' Language Learning Strategies

ZENNIA HANCOCK, UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, COLLEGE PARK

The learning strategies of language learners have been researched extensively. (See, e.g., Brown, 2000; Oxford, 1990; Rubin & Thompson, 1982; Shipman & Shipman, 1985; Stevick, 1976). This research focuses on English-speaking students learning a foreign language and on non-English speakers learning English. To date, there have been no published studies on the use of language learning strategies by heritage Spanish speakers studying Spanish. Research is needed on this unique and growing student population so that educators can learn how to work more effectively with them.

This digest describes some of the issues involved in the Spanish language learning experiences of heritage Spanish speakers, the largest population of heritage language speakers in the United States. It describes ways in which educators can facilitate these students' language development through a better understanding of their language learning strategies and suggests areas in which further research is needed.

Heritage Spanish Speakers In Language Classes

Spanish-speaking students have been referred to as "native speakers, quasi-native speakers, residual speakers, bilingual speakers, and home-background speakers" (Valdés 1997, p. 13). Those who study Spanish in school often come to formal education with skills in comprehension and conversation, but the literacy skills of this population vary widely, ranging from extremely fluent to receptive to only partially receptive (Valdés, 1997). The degree of oral Spanish proficiency also varies widely among these students, ranging from native proficiency to what Bills has called "disfluency" (1997, p. 267).

Traditionally, heritage Spanish speakers have been placed in Spanish classes with English speakers learning Spanish as a second language. This can be problematic. Other students may resent the heritage speakers' native-like familiarity with oral language and the appearance that the Spanish speakers are studying "a language they already know" (Peyton, Lewelling, & Winke, 2001, p. 1). At the same time, while the Spanish speakers may be able to discuss day-to-day topics related to home and community, they may have difficulty communicating about more complex topics, such as politics, literature, or careers, and with the mechanics of Spanish writing, such as spelling, syntax, and use of accents. This situation is challenging for heritage Spanish speakers and potentially frustrating for other students. "Neither the Spanish language needs nor the abilities of either group can be duly or successfully addressed" (Peale, 1991, p. 448). Increasingly, researchers and educators realize that these students need courses tailored to their specific needs (Bills, 1997).

Some Factors to Consider

A number of factors affect the learning of Spanish by native speakers.

Varieties of Spanish. The belief that some dialects of Spanish are inferior to a standard or widely accepted form of the language can manifest itself in the attitudes of the teacher, other students, and even the speakers of those dialects. Spanish speakers who encounter negative attitudes toward their dialects in the Spanish class may become embarrassed and reluctant to participate for fear of ridicule or correction. Some Latino students in university Spanish classes have claimed that because they spoke non-standard dialects of Spanish, their teachers gave them lower grades (Villa, 1996).

Cultural Connections. As dialects vary, so do cultures. Previous studies have shown positive correlations between learning styles and ethnic background (e.g., Vásquez, 1990). For example, some researchers have found that Latino students learn particularly well in groups rather than by themselves (Griggs & Dunn, 1996). According to Oxford (1990), "Hispanics seem to use social strategies more than do some other ethnic groups" (p. 13). Research on the sensory dimension of learning styles has shown that Latino students are "frequently auditory" learners (Oxford, 2001, p. 360). While generalizations like these about cultural groups need to be treated with caution, learning style preferences such as preference for group or individual work do need to be considered in designing instruction.

Nonnative Spanish Teachers. Many Spanish courses are taught by nonnative speakers of Spanish. Heritage Spanish speakers may not identify with or respect as a Spanish teacher someone whose native language is not Spanish. Brown's (2000) research suggests that empathy—the capacity to relate emotionally to someone else—may contribute to the success of language learners. If Latinos cannot relate emotionally to Anglo teachers (or to Spanish-speaking teachers from a different country or region than the one they associate with), their academic success may be affected.

Instructional Methodologies

To address the issues described above, researchers have suggested the following guidelines for teaching heritage Spanish speakers:

- Learn about and show respect for different cultures and dialects. Highlight vocabulary choices and grammatical structures for different contexts and purposes rather than prescribing specific rules for all occasions. Speak, for example, of Southwest, Puerto Rican, or Cuban Spanish rather than formal and informal Spanish (Villa, 1996).
- Base courses on topics that have cultural appeal to heritage Spanish speakers (Faltis, 1990).
- Observe student behavior in the classroom and identify whether students benefit most from group or individual work, oral or written language exercises, and so forth (Vásquez, 1990).
- When designing courses, include writing activities (including spelling, self-editing, transcribing, translating, and journaling), contrastive analysis (activities to explore and acknowledge a variety of dialects), culture (projects involving research beyond the classroom), and oral skills (class discussions and community work) (Aparicio, 1983, pp. 236-237).

These suggestions focus on how teachers can teach better rather than on how students can take responsibility for their learning. However, teachers can help students identify their learning habits, preferences, and skills in order to help themselves. One way to do this is to make students aware of their own particular language learning strategies.

Language Learning Strategies

Oxford (2001) presents six categories of language learning strategies: cognitive, metacognitive, memory-related, compensatory, affective, and social (p. 359). They can be summarized as follows:

Cognitive: practicing and repeating new words; deductive reasoning, translating, analyzing; taking notes, highlighting, summarizing

Metacognitive: paying attention, organizing, setting goals and objectives, evaluating one's own performance

Memory-related: creating mental linkages, such as grouping and placing words in context; applying images and sounds to represent things in memory; structured reviewing; using mechanical techniques, such as physical response

Compensatory: selecting a topic for discussion based on one's knowledge of the language and shaping the discussion to avoid unknown vocabulary, guessing at words based on context, using gestures and coining words to communicate

Affective: using music or laughter as part of the learning process, rewarding oneself, making positive statements about one's own progress, discussing feelings

FL027480

CENTER FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS • ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS • 4646 40TH ST NW • WASHINGTON DC 20016-1859 • 202-362-0700

Social: seeking correction, asking for clarification, working with peers, developing cultural understanding (Oxford 2001, pp. 363-365)

Some strategies are guided by exterior influences—teachers, activities, interactions—and others relate to the student's personality, motivation, and knowledge about how to learn.

Oxford's 1990 publication, *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know*, is designed to make teachers and students aware of language learning strategies and the various ways they can be used to facilitate language learning. In one section of the text, Oxford gives 19 different scenarios describing language learners with specific goals. The reader is to identify which language learning strategies could be used to accomplish the goals. For example:

> You are an English-speaking high school student learning Italian. You have a good sense of humor and enjoy jokes and cartoons. You decide to buy an Italian cookbook. It is about 100 pages long, full of cartoons. You want to read the book, understand the cartoons, and explain some of the cartoons to your friends who do not know Italian at all. Which language learning strategies do you need to use? (Oxford, 1990, p. 33)

For the above scenario, readers might identify the following strategies that could be used:

Cognitive: Analyze the language of the text (see how the cartoons convey humor)

Metacognitive: Set goals (decide how much to learn on your own and when to show the book to your friends)

Memory-related: Place words in context (certain vocabulary will be used for cooking)

Compensatory: Select which recipes or cartoons to focus on

Affective: Use laughter (understand language through the cartoons)

Social: Cooperate with peers (include your friends in your learning process)

This activity can be used to teach awareness of language learning strategies and ways to use them.

Strategies for Heritage Spanish Speakers

While the scenarios in Oxford's book are useful to foreign language and ESL teachers and students, none of them involves students learning their own language. Heritage Spanish speakers might work with scenarios such as the following:

> You are a high school student living in New York City with your parents, who are from Puerto Rico. They speak Spanish with you all the time, but you speak to them in English. You are getting ready to leave home to attend college, where you want to study advertising. You also want to study Spanish, because you realize that employers value bilingual employees. You want to practice reading and writing before you leave for college. Which language learning strategies could you use to prepare yourself for college Spanish?

> You are a student at the University of Maryland. You grew up speaking Spanish with your Salvadoran parents, but you want to improve your Spanish writing skills. You have a chance to do this when your grandmother, who has recently come to the United States from El Salvador to live with your family, asks you to help her write down her childhood memories for you and her other grandchildren. Which language learning strategies could you use for this project?

As well as listing the language learning strategies that would be useful in these scenarios, heritage Spanish speakers may also develop their own scenarios and exchange them with other students. Scenarios might include issues such as dialectical varieties of Spanish (and the desire or need to learn the prestige variety), expansion of vocabulary knowledge, and the pressures associated with achieving improved literacy in one's native language. The aim is to increase students' awareness of the social issues involved in learning their own language, teach them how to identify and take advantage of the learning strategies they are comfortable with, and expose them to new strategies to enhance their learning.

Conclusion

There is a need for research and practice focused on the language learning strategies of heritage Spanish speakers. Projects that need to be undertaken include the development of language learning scenarios for heritage Spanish speakers, such as the ones presented in this digest; and development of a language learning strategy inventory specifically for heritage Spanish speakers, patterned after Oxford's (1990) inventories for English language learners and for English speakers learning other languages. Researchers need to ascertain whether a certain set of optimal learning conditions may apply specifically to heritage Spanish speakers. Solid research in this area may help teachers better serve Spanish-speaking students in their classes by teaching them how to become aware of and responsible for their own learning.

References

Aparicio, F. R. (1983). Teaching Spanish to the native speaker at the college level. *Hispania, 66*, 232-238.

Bills, G. (1997). Language shift, linguistic variation, and teaching Spanish to native speakers in the United States. In M. C. Colombi & F. X. Alarcon (Eds.), *La ensenanza del espanol a hispanohablantes: Praxis y teoria* (pp. 263-282). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Brown, H. D. (2000). *Principles of language teaching and learning* (4th ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.

Faltis, C. (1990). Spanish for native speakers: Freirian and Vygotskian perspectives. *Foreign Language Annals, 2* (2), 117-26.

Griggs, S., & Dunn, R. (1996). *Hispanic-American students and learning style* (ERIC Digest No. EDO-PS-96-4). Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED393607) (Also available in *Emergency Librarian, 23* (2), 11-16.)

Oxford, R. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Oxford, R. (2001). Language learning styles and strategies. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (3rd ed.). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Peale, C. G. (1991). Spanish for native speakers (and other "native languages") in California's schools: A rationale statement. *Hispania, 74*, 446-51.

Peyton, J. K., Lewelling, V. W., & Winke, P. (2001). *Spanish for native speakers: Developing dual language proficiency* (ERIC Digest No. EDO-FL-01-09). Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics. Retrieved October 17, 2002, from http://www.cal.org/ericcll/digest/spanish_native.html

Rubin, J., & Thompson, I. (1982). *How to be a more successful language learner*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Shipman, S., & Shipman, V. C. (1985). Cognitive styles: Some conceptual, methodological, and applied issues. *Review of Research in Education, 12*, 229-291.

Stevick, E. W. (1976). *Memory, meaning, and method: Some psychological perspectives on language learning*. Rowley, MA: Newbury.

Valdés, G. (1997). The teaching of Spanish to bilingual Spanish-speaking students: Outstanding issues and unanswered questions.††In M. C. Colombi & F. X. Alarcon (Eds.), *La ensenanza del espanol a hispanohablantes: Praxis y teoria* (pp. 93-101). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Vásquez, J. A. (1990). Teaching to the distinctive traits of minority students. *The Clearing House, 63* (7), 299-304.

Villa, D. J. (1996). Choosing a "standard" variety of Spanish for the instruction of native Spanish speakers in the U.S. *Foreign Language Annals, 29* (2), 191-200.

This digest was prepared with funding from the U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Library of Education, under contract no. ED-99-CO-0008. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of ED, OERI, or NLE.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

	This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.
X	This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").